

*Cheshire West and Chester*  
CIVIC AWARDS *for* DESIGN  
AND CONSERVATION : 2021

THE JUDGES' REPORT



# 2021 CIVIC AWARDS FOR DESIGN AND CONSERVATION

These awards are normally presented on a 5 year cycle but because of the pandemic it was decided to defer this tenth round of the 'Civic Awards' until we returned a little closer to normality. At the beginning of 2021 we reviewed the situation and despite some doubts it was decided to move forward with the invitation of nominations. Despite several difficulties and setbacks, the Organising Committee has brought the process to a successful conclusion.

By rewarding the best architectural projects in the last six years, this Award Scheme aims to stimulate interest in our built environment and develop a deeper and broader appreciation of both traditional craft skills and high quality contemporary construction. All the sponsoring bodies (Cheshire West and Chester, the Cheshire Society of Architects and Chester Civic Trust) hope that the Awards will raise the profile of good architectural design in our community.

**Nominations have been submitted under the four usual categories together with a new category for sustainable development. The five categories for this round are therefore:**

- Residential Developments
- Community, Health and Educational Buildings
- Commercial, Retail, and Industrial Buildings
- Public Realm and Open Spaces
- Sustainable Development

Each of the categories was also divided into either wholly or largely new build projects or conversion, refurbishment and conservation projects. Seventy nominations were made by the public, architectural practices, owners and contractors.

A judging panel was appointed by the Award Sponsors, information submitted with nominations was closely inspected and a shortlist was agreed. This was followed by two long days of visits after which the judging panel arrived at its final decisions.

The judges were impressed with the diverse nature and quality of the schemes nominated for these awards and were pleased to see that they were from all parts of Cheshire West and Chester. There was an interesting debate before agreeing that seven of the nominations were worthy of an Award; following further discussions we decided that eight further projects should be Highly Commended. Information on these fifteen schemes is included on the following pages with a short commentary from the judging panel explaining what influenced its decision. A further ten nominations were considered worthy of recognition and will receive Certificates of Commendation; these are listed on the back page.

It became obvious to the judges that successful projects generally resulted from a close working relationship between the building owner, the design team and all the contractors and sub-contractors responsible for the building work. Finally, my thanks go to Steve Wright who helped organised the visits and to my fellow judges Councillor Louise Gittins, Kirsty Henderson, Eileen Willshaw, Stephen Savory, Geoff Clifton, Michael Scammel, Rory Chisholm and Philip Harrison for their hard work and for making the whole process great fun!

**Peter Hadfield**  
Chair of Judging Panel

### **Handley Oak**

#### **Award: Residential Conservation**

Client: **Private Owner**

Designers: **Donald Insall Associates**

Contractors: **Recclesia**

Handley Oak is a private house in the village of Handley. The house is a grade II listed timber framed building with origins in the mid sixteenth century. It was rescued from a demolition order in the mid-twentieth century and subsequently restored.

The building was suffering from water ingress through gaps between the frame and the modern brick infill panels. The brick infill panels, installed later than the timber frame, contributed to the building's poor thermal performance and decay to the frame. A contemporary breathable infill panel has improved both the structural integrity and thermal performance of the building.

During this process, the discovery of an original window aperture was made that dated from 1601. This exciting discovery and the subsequent analysis of its surviving fragments allowed for its restoration. A superb team effort involving the owner, the architect, a specialist contractor, and the support of the local authority, allowed the significance of this building to be revealed once more.



### **Shot Tower Development of New Apartments**

#### **Award: Residential New Build**

Client: **Whitecroft Group**

Designers: **DLA Architecture**

Contractors: **Construction Partnership UK Limited**

The Grade II\* listed Shot Tower, built in 1799 to manufacture lead shot, is a significant landmark in Chester, the oldest of the three remaining shot towers in the UK. The site was very challenging to develop and had lain dormant for many years. Archaeological and land contamination considerations, plus development affecting the setting of the listed structure, were three of many issues to overcome in a lengthy development and planning process. Repair work on the tower continues, and the new build apartments on the site were completed in 2021.

The judges are delighted to see that the design of the new apartments rises to the challenge of developing such a sensitive site. The bold modern design and materials respond to the former industrial context of the site and canal side setting. Together with the copper clad Waitrose store on the opposite side of the canal this new development maintains and enhances the views of the shot tower and provides an impressive addition to the series of old and new buildings along the canal.



### Storyhouse

**Award: Community New Build and Conversion**

Client: Cheshire West and Chester  
Architects: Bennetts Associates  
Contractors: Kier Group PLC



The Odeon was designed by Robert Bullivant who was part of a team of Birmingham based architects headed by Harry Weedon. It opened in 1936 and served Chester as a cinema until its closure in 2007.

The building was listed Grade II in 1989. Storyhouse is housed within the Odeon building together with the site of the demolished Commerce House.

The new complex, which opened in 2017, combines a theatre, cinema, library and restaurant creating a unique cultural and community centre. The theatre is contained in a new extension located behind the position of the screen of the original Odeon, it can be arranged in an 800-seat proscenium arch format or as a 500-seat thrust stage. In addition, a studio theatre and linked bar sit over the main auditorium. The shell of the old Odeon has a 100-seat cinema suspended above the kitchen, restaurant and bar and the library is distributed throughout the building at both ground and first floor level. Over 130 different community groups use Storyhouse as a base for regular creative activity each month.

Despite some areas which the Judges felt did not work well, we were unanimous in our decision that the project be given an Award to recognise its fantastic contribution to the community and cultural life of the City.

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### The Lookout, Pettypool

**Award: Community New Build**

Owner: Girlguiding Cheshire Forest  
Architect: Walker Simpson Architects  
Contractors: City Build

The Lookout at Pettypool is a purpose-built accommodation and activity building, for the Cheshire Forest Girl Guides, which replaces an older building on a different part of the site that was no longer fit for purpose. The creation of this building and associated tireless fundraising to realise the vision was many years in the making. The form and massing of the building is simple, with the use of coloured larch cladding creating colour, shadow, and visual playfulness to the facades. The landscaping and associated topography form the essential setting, creating a beautiful and tranquil rural environment.

The interior is also impressive, high quality, colourful and inviting, with large sliding doors to the main activity area that fully open out onto decking to create a seamless indoor and outdoor environment. These features, including purpose made bunk beds in well-designed dormitories, and a built-in outdoor seating area underneath the building facing the lawn, will allow this inspiring building to serve the girl guides for many years to come. The Judges were impressed with the facilities provided for disabled girls making this building usable by all.



### Burton Manor

#### Award: Commercial Conservation and Refurbishment

Owner: **Burton Manor Restoration Company**

Architects: **Donald Insall Associates**

Contractors: **Burton Manor Restoration Company**

Built in 1805, Burton Manor was the former house of the Gladstone family. This Grade II listed building stood empty for several years and had suffered from water damage and serious outbreaks of brown rot decay. Burton Manor Restoration Company appointed Donald Insall Associates to carry out conservation repairs, with the full support of the local authority, to halt the rot and put back damaged or lost architectural features. Other works, such as the removal of asbestos and repairs to the Westmoreland slate roofs were also granted to facilitate the new use as commercial office space. This included the inclusion of fully accessible lifts and retaining, for the most part, the original plan form of the building.

Because the repairs were so extensive, the works relied on enabling development, which are ongoing and are outside the parameters of this award. The scheme included significant community benefit including the return of a hugely successful café and shop for the village. Burton Manor's impressive restoration and re-use, given its parlous condition, is to be applauded.



### Town Park, Winsford

#### Award: Public Realm Improvements

Owner: **Cheshire West and Chester Council**

Designers: **Cheshire West and Chester Landscape Team**

Artist: **Liam Hopkins**

Contractors: **Dunkil Developments Ltd**

Town Park is the first phase of a major regeneration project in the centre of Winsford. The Park had a history of neglect and anti-social behaviour, it provided some seats, grassy areas and trees but was largely forgotten and virtually unused.

The improvements have opened visual sight lines and maximised the full potential of the park, both ecologically and functionally. The central feature is a well used play zone for all ages and abilities with outdoor gym and multi-use games area. Other improvements include, two ponds, prairie planting, a viewing platform,

new entrance features, tree planting and wildflower meadows. The Judges particularly liked "The Seven Sisters" salt sculptures by Manchester artist Liam Hopkins which reflect the heritage and history of the salt industry in the area. Winsford Town Council, under a long term lease, are now responsible for managing and maintaining the park. The Judges were also very pleased that a new Friends Group has been formed, they meet on a regular basis to carry out maintenance operations and organise community events.





### **Delamere Forest Visitors Centre**

#### **Award: New Build Sustainable Development**

Client: **Forestry England**

Designers: **Design Group Chester**

Contractors: **Willmott Dixon**

The centre was completed in September 2020 and forms part of a major redevelopment of facilities at Delamere Forest, the largest undertaken by Forestry England. The redevelopment aims to improve access and the experience of visitors to the forest from Cheshire and neighbouring towns and cities. The centre includes a café, toilets, and an exhibition and welcome area. A key aim of Forestry England and their design team was to demonstrate high quality sustainable design including the use of timber to achieve savings in energy in the use and construction of the building. In the view of the judging panel this has been achieved through an attractive and welcoming design with good external facilities and landscaping. The main structure comprises laminated timber columns, beams and trusses,

and the external cladding, which includes high levels of insulation, is durable larch timber sourced from Scotland. Heating and hot water is provided by a ground source heat pump with 16 boreholes; electricity by roof mounted solar panels; and the café is naturally ventilated by wind catchers mounted on the roof. Rainwater is harvested for re-use in the building. The centre provides an excellent resource for visitors, including school parties, to experience the natural environment of Delamere Forest, and demonstrates to building owners, developers, and designers how energy use in buildings can be minimised in response to the challenges of global warming



### **Greenbank Hall**

#### **Highly Commended: Residential Conversion and New Build**

Developers: **Scheme Global Properties Ltd**

Architects: **Owen Ellis Architects**

Contractors: **Heritage Building and Conservation (York)**

The Hall was built in 1820 for John Swarbreck Rogers, a local glove manufacturer and mayor of Chester. From 1907 the house was occupied by Peter Jones, an Ellesmere Port businessman and in 1923 a doorway and a separate gatehouse were added. The building was converted into a college in about 1980. Despite being Grade II listed, once the college moved out the building was allowed to deteriorate and there were concerns that it would become derelict.

The project comprises the conversion of the Hall into apartments, altering and extending the Gatehouse to form two houses and the construction of four new houses in the grounds. The Hall and Gatehouse have been refurbished to a high standard and the Judges like the way that a penthouse has been added behind the parapet. The new houses are of a simple but stylish modern design with stone and rendered walls topped with slate roofs.



### Tramways

#### Highly Commended: Residential New Build

Owners: **Student Roost**

Architects: **Kelsey Design Associates**

Engineering: **Westlakes Engineering Ltd**

Contractors: **Watkins Jones**

Prior to its redevelopment as a student accommodation complex the Tramways site was always associated with transport. It was first developed in the 1840s as a part of Chester's first railway station before becoming a wagon repair workshop and later a tram depot until the 1930s. Although the site was subsequently redeveloped and used as a bus station, evidence of the old industrial and transport heritage remained. The tram tracks, still in their original stone setts, ran like a spine through the site such that their retention and incorporation defined the project and the new layout from the outset. Historic foundations were also identified during a detailed archaeological evaluation, these have been preserved by careful design of the new foundations.

The new complex comprises five blocks of a distinctly contemporary design with a variety of massing and roofscape, finishes include a mix of brickwork, zinc and bronze rainscreen cladding. Situated within a conservation area, the materials respect the local vernacular whilst reflecting its industrial heritage.



### Abbey School

#### Highly Commended: Educational Conversion

Client: **Abbey School**

Designers: **Barron Design**

Contractors: **Read Construction**

Abbey School occupies a pair of mid-Eighteenth Century town houses in Abbey Square, formerly used as a Convent. Listed at Grade II\*, the buildings feature well-preserved interiors with a plethora of fine historic features, most notably a pair of lofty, dramatic staircases. The school was determined to offer children with a wide range of special needs a safe and welcoming environment in the very heart of Chester. Transforming these demanding period spaces into highly specialised educational use without

the unacceptable erosion of original character must at first have seemed a daunting, if not impossible prospect for the design team. To the credit of all involved, the widest range of imaginative and easily reversible solutions has been devised to create an entirely practical environment which works for pupils and the character of the building alike.



### **Agricola Tower**

#### **Highly Commended: Community Conservation**

Client: **English Heritage**

Designers: **Donald Insall Associates**

Contractors: **Grosvenor Construction**

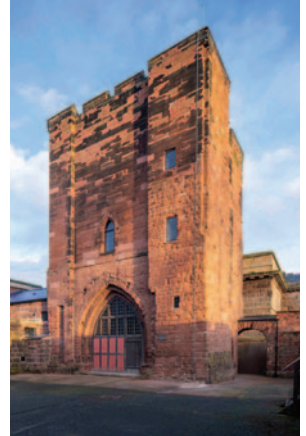
Donald Insall Associates were commissioned to visit Chester Castle to assess the condition of the Agricola Tower and Guard House roofs and propose relevant repairs. The Project aimed to address defects identified through a condition survey to the Agricola Tower and Guardhouse of Chester Castle.

Replacement of the flat lead roof to the Tower was required along with provision of improved rainwater goods discharging from the Tower and Guardhouse. A programme of masonry repairs and other identified condition defects was undertaken at the same time to make best use of access.

The Agricola Tower is a significant survival of the 12th Century and contains rare medieval wall

paintings on the first floor. The tower is three storeys high with a battlemented parapet and flat lead roof. A nineteenth century single storey guardhouse and jail block adjoins on the Northwest side. The tower shares an enclosed area with buildings currently unused but managed by the Crown Estate.

The Judges were disappointed that the site is not open to the public, though some tours do take place, but were pleased to see the fabric of the building repaired to a high standard safeguarding the Tower and Guardhouse for the future.



### **Chester Bus Interchange**

#### **Highly Commended: Community New Build**

Client: **Cheshire West and Chester Council**

Architects: **Jefferson Sheard Architects**

Contractors: **Graham Construction**

This transport hub was relocated to allow the construction of the Northgate Development with an aim to provide better integration between bus/train services and improved linkages to the city centre/cycle routes. The horseshoe-shaped building incorporates an enclosed terminus with canopy, ticket office, retail space and café.

Sited within the Chester Conservation Area this very modern design is exciting and bold. Glulam timber beams form a curved roof/canopy, covered externally with an extensive sedum/grass finish. The finished building achieves the original concept to provide green space terracing in relation to Chester Cathedral.

The judges were impressed by the building itself. The thoughtful and thoroughness of design is evident in the detailing of the structure, the fittings, and paving. However, in the judge's opinion, the main function of the building is severely compromised by it being in the wrong place. It is too far from the train station. Traffic flows to and from the hub (George St. and Frodsham St.) are confusing and pedestrian access is limited to only one controlled road crossing.

An excellent building marred by illogical town planning.





### Whitby Road Memorial Garden, Ellesmere Port.

#### Highly Commended: Public Realm Improvements

Owners: Cheshire West and Chester Council  
Designers: Cheshire West and Chester  
Landscape Team  
Contractors: W E Parsons Ltd

A plaque commemorating workers from the Mersey Iron Works who died in the First World War was originally sited by the ironworks in Cromwell Road. When the works closed twenty years ago the plaque was moved to the Royal British Legion for storage but perceived as 'lost' for the town.

Land for a new Memorial Garden became available when a derelict building was demolished on a site adjoining the town's Grade II listed former Queens Cinema. Located between Cromwell Road and the railway station, this site is a key gateway into the town.

The garden has been beautifully designed using high quality Yorkstone paving, metal railings and themed planting which help frame the plaque. A bespoke corten steel sculpture has been designed, which also provides a vessel for poppies.

The judges thought the concept, the design, the effort, and energy required to bring this project to fruition are all extremely commendable. What is happening since completion however is of concern. The garden is now beginning to look shabby and unfortunate activities on adjacent properties add to the air of neglect.



### Chester Zoo Nature Reserve

#### Highly Commended: Sustainable Development

Client: Chester Zoo  
Designers: Ryder Landscape Consultants  
Contractors: G Scarfo and Sons

In 2018 Chester Zoo enlarged a small nature reserve created in 2013, to form the current reserve on 6 hectares of low grade agricultural land adjacent to the zoo. It is adjacent to the Shropshire Union Canal and is part of the Zoo's overall Conservation Masterplan. By working with community partners in the region, the Zoo aims to create Nature Connection Corridors in the region, forming linear wildlife habitats. It is free to access by the general public, and steps have also been taken to make routes through the reserve accessible by wheelchairs. Colourful interpretation boards explain the features of the reserve and the wildlife supported by the habitats. There are also

seating and picnic areas along the route. The judges were impressed by the maturity of the self-generated and managed planting and the ponds. Monitoring of the wildlife present, including hedgehogs, bumblebees, other pollinating insects, and birds has demonstrated significant increases in numbers and variety of species. The nature reserve addresses the challenges of avoiding the loss of wildlife and habitats from climate change and other causes, and the role that the creation of undisturbed meadows and wetlands can play in absorbing carbon dioxide.



**Trafford Hall**

**Highly Commended: Sustainable Development**

Client: **Regenda Group**  
Designers: **M and Y Maintenance and Construction**  
Contractors: **M and Y Maintenance and Construction**

Trafford Hall is a Grade II\* listed Georgian Hall in 14 acres of grounds. For many years it has been the home of the National Communities Resource Centre and re-opened in 2021, after a temporary closure. It is now part of the Regenda housing group and a YHA hostel. Since 2020 Regenda has been undertaking a major programme of environmental improvements to the hall, the accommodation and training buildings, and the grounds. In 2018 a biomass boiler was installed to provide a carbon neutral source of energy for the whole site. Other improvements to the hall include installation of secondary glazing and low

energy LED lighting throughout. Built over 20 years ago the accommodation block is an early example of sustainable design built with timber structure and cladding, and a green roof. The external cladding has now been replaced with sustainable Larch timber and the insulation and airtightness improved. The carbon neutral “stables” training block, timber clad with solar PV panels on the roof, was built in 2005 and has also been upgraded. The long-term commitment to sustainability also extends to the grounds and the operation of the centre. Two ponds have been dredged and planting managed to improve biodiversity, and wildlife including bats and great crested newts have been protected. The centre acts as an excellent venue for sustainability and community energy events and from 2022 will host an Energy Plus Academy. The work has been undertaken to ensure that the historic features of the hall are protected, and the accommodation and training facilities located away from the hall, so the setting of the listed building is not affected.



# CIVIC AWARDS 2021 COMMENDATIONS

## **Gifford Lea Retirement Village**

**Tattenhall**

Residential New Build

Client: Inspired Villages Group  
Masterplan & Design Architects: Tyack Architects  
Delivery Architects: Pozzoni Architecture  
Landscape Architects: Portus + Whitton  
Contractor: Seddon Construction

## **Kings School Chester**

**New Infants School and Junior School Extension**

Educational New Build

Client: Kings School  
Designer: Child Graddon Lewis  
Contractor: Anwyl Construction

## **Beeston Castle**

**Reconstruction Bronze Age Roundhouse**

New Education/Community Building

Client: English Heritage  
Designer: Luke Winter Historic Concepts Ltd  
Contractor: Volunteer Team

## **Wesley Methodist Chapel**

**Chester**

Community Building Refurbishment

Client: Wesley Developments Ltd  
Designer: Donald Insall Associates  
Contractor: Armitage Constructio

## **Aldford Village Square**

**Green Lake Lane**

Commercial Conversion

Client: Eaton Estates  
Designer: NWD Architects  
Contractor: Armitage Construction

## **Carriage Shed**

**City Place, Chester**

Public Realm Refurbishment

Client: Cheshire West and Chester  
Designer: Donald Insall Associates  
Contractor: MPH Construction

## **George Street Pocket Park**

**Chester**

New Public Realm

Client: Cheshire West and Chester  
Designer: CWaC Landscape Team  
Contractor: Dunkil Developments Ltd

## **Forest City Garden**

**Chester**

Public Realm Refurbishment

Client: Cheshire West and Chester  
Designer: CWaC Landscape Team and ForEST  
Contractor: W E Parsons Ltd

## **11 Hamilton Street**

**Chester**

Sustainable Development Refurbishment

Client: Private Owner  
Designer: Helen and Andy Waring  
Contractor: Helen and Andy Waring

## **Neston Recreation Centre**

**Solar PV Installation**

Sustainable Development Refurbishment

Client: Brio Leisure  
Contractor: Genfit

